

IFT Traceability Improvement Initiative and July Research Summit



IFT's Traceability Improvement Initiative, supported by BASF Nutrition & Health and Underwriters Laboratories (at the silver level) and the Fisheries Scholarship Fund of the National Fisheries Institute (at the bronze level), aims to advance work in the area of food product tracing through hosted events where thought leaders exchange knowledge and ideas, and by supporting research conducted by IFT, including a pilot focused on interoperability. The initiative also funds the generation and dissemination of IFT's product tracing work so that food system stakeholders have ongoing access to cutting-edge thinking, trends and research.

About the July 2011 IFT Traceability Research Summit

Overview

With so many different initiatives in the area of product tracing underway, and the expectation that the FDA will conduct pilots in support of the Food Safety Modernization Act, IFT saw the need for an open and honest discussion about the state of traceability—and the expectations for a rapid, accurate product tracing system in the future.

As a leader in this area, IFT brought a myriad of talented, progressive individuals and organizations together to participate in thought-provoking discussions in an effort to:

- Define what a "successful" tracing system can accomplish, including how to measure success
- Outline the necessary steps, and in some cases challenges, to achieve that success
- Provide a general understanding of traceability pilots and initiatives currently underway
- Identify data gaps and recommend research strategies for bridging them



July 14, 2011, Arlington, VA

50+ food system stakeholders representing:

- Trade associations
- Regulators
- Technology Providers
- Standards Organizations
- Consultants
- and more

“The [IFT Traceability Research] summit should prove to be the critical turning point in organizing the US food industry to update its supply chain to deliver a new level of practical traceability.”

—2011 IFT Traceability Research Summit Attendee

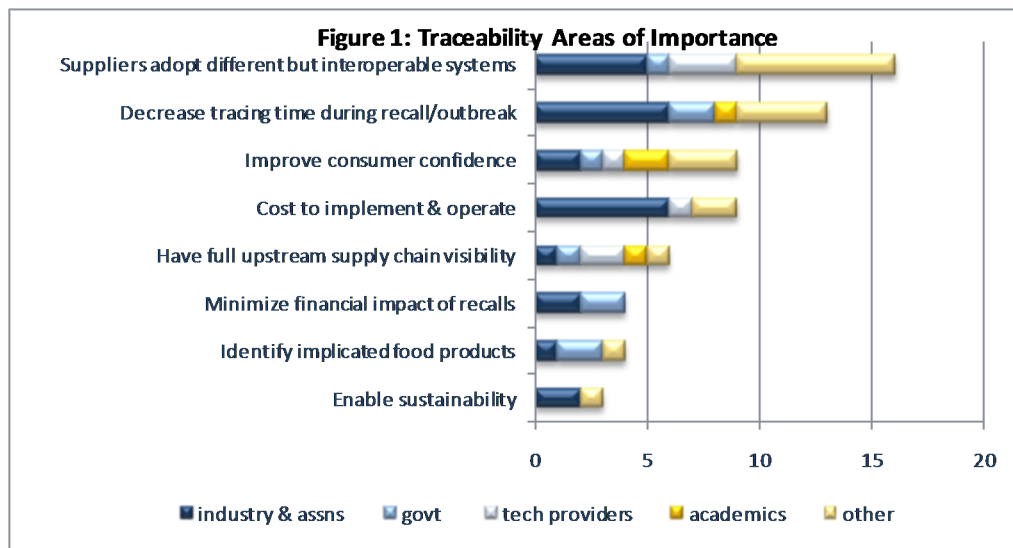
IFT Traceability Research Summit Proceedings Highlights

Vision

By 2012, a mission and vision roadmap will be established to define and articulate the vision and scope for a rapid and accurate product tracing system. Ultimately, a system that is global, economical, scalable, and inclusive of firms of all sizes handling all types of food products, will have the greatest likelihood for success. While the development of the vision is still unknown, there is general consensus that a joint partnership including all stakeholders is a necessity.

Traceability Areas of Importance

Each attendee was provided with two stickers and had an opportunity to “vote” on 23 factors important for a traceability system. The color of the sticker was based on the stakeholder type. The top factors, as well as the number of votes by stakeholder group, are provided in **Figure 1**.



Standards

The scope and granularities of standardization, including how to define and achieve standardization, need to be deliberated. The group cautioned that until a vision is agreed upon, a more detailed discussion of standards would be premature, although all recognized the role standards must play in this area.

What are regulators looking for?

While there are many types of data a company may find advantage in capturing, when there is an outbreak, the data needed by regulators to conduct an effective trace are really quite simple—regulators need the “what, where, and when” information to quickly identify links through a supply chain. This includes not only transactional information (who sold what, when, to whom, etc.) but also covers aspects of internal traceability (what went into what, etc.).

What are the steps to achieve interoperability?

A key message echoed throughout the Summit was “don’t reinvent the wheel.” Finding ways to link systems in current use will result in higher adoption and greater efficiency. All recognized that in the future, different systems will exist, but must be able to “talk” to one another, under certain, legitimate, authenticated circumstances, with security protocols in place. There are many details to be determined, including standards that either need to be established or settled upon. Still, most believe that interoperability is necessary for forward progress.

What are industry costs and benefits?

Discussions at the Summit validated sentiments of other publications and reports: the types of costs (both initial and ongoing) and the potential benefits (both to industry and to society) are fairly well described. However, their quantification is dependent on the exact system to be used, and will depend on the point in the supply chain, current capabilities, and required changes.

Full proceedings, and other resources, will be available online at ift.org/traceability. To get involved in the IFT Traceability Improvement Initiative, contact Jennifer McEntire at jmcentire@ift.org.